

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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CONFESSIONS OF A CARETAKER.

A SERIAL STORY.

By "RITA."

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"My Lord Concelt," etc.*

CHAPTER VI MISS KATE'S MARRIAGE

I HAVE to go back to my diary again to look up that time of Miss Kate's return.

I find that the Court was renovated and the rooms refurnished, and the grounds all done up; that horses were once more in the stables and carriages in the coach-house, and that it was all in honour of the young heiress.

Sir Rupert brought her home, and I was surprised to see how much older he looked, and what a haggard, careworn expression his face often wore.

As for my young lady, she was very little altered. Perhaps she was not quite so pretty as I used to think. She was very slight, and I suppose what one would call "medium height;" but one could only think of her as "little." She had such pretty hands and feet, such a pretty way of carrying her dainty little head; such a multitude of expressions that her face was always a sort of surprise; and such "ways"—I can call them nothing else—changeable, wilful, coaxing, impulsive, passionate; but every mood had its charm. And she now had suitors enough to try her caprices on.

I don't think she cared for any one. But she was a wicked little flirt, and no mistake. I suppose she couldn't help it. It was just inborn in her—an inheritance, probably, from that impulsive Southern-born mother she had never known.

The suitor who seemed the most eligible—if not externally the most attractive—

was a Mr. Carruthers, of Templecombe, a place some two miles further north than Dayrell Court.

He was much older than Miss Kate; but so a husband ought to be for any girl as wilful and impulsive as she was. He was very good and very kind-hearted; besides, he was enormously rich, and of unexceptionable birth and position, and worshipped my young lady with all his true, brave, honest soul.

Sir Rupert, I could see, was very anxious that the match should take place; but as for Miss Kate herself, she wasn't an atom in love with Mr. Carruthers, though I could see she liked him very much, and treated him far better than she did any of her other suitors.

She held him on and off for a long time. I often wondered whether she would marry him in the end; but I doubted it. However, circumstances often force people to commit certain actions which they never thought of committing, and I shall never forget what brought Miss Kate's marriage about.

I never rightly understood Mr. Vining's will; but I knew that she had a large fortune to inherit when she was twenty-one. The poor old gentleman never thought of appointing trustees, but left Sir Rupert to invest and manage it all. Well, to make a long story short, when Miss Kate was eighteen she learnt that this precious father of hers had been making ducks and drakes of her money.

He told her quite coolly—and told her, too, that the best thing she could do was to marry John Carruthers, and then she would never feel the miss of her fortune at all.

Poor Miss Kate. What a fury she was in that night! How she paced that room,

and stormed, and raved, and vowed she would go and be a governess at her old school, and never speak to Sir Rupert again; and then, just as of old, burst into sobs and tears and cried herself broken-heartedly to sleep in my arms.

From that day she changed very much. Perhaps it was that first shock which planted doubt and suspicion where all had been trust and faith. Perhaps it was the feeling that her father had never loved her as the poor old tender-hearted man had loved her, who was lying at rest now under the grasses of the quiet Richmond cemetery.

She became colder, harder, less impulsive. Sometimes she would sit for hours in the garden—a book on her lap—her hands listlessly folded, but her eyes staring up at the blue sky and the dancing leaves, as if her thoughts were hundreds of miles away.

It was one day, while she was sitting thus in one of her favourite haunts in the park, that Mr. Carruthers saw her, and at last spoke out.

Of course I don't know what he said, or what arguments he used, or how he tamed the little wild, capricious creature who had tortured him so long. I only know that she came back to the house, subdued, quiet, thoughtful; that Mr. Carruthers had a short talk with Sir Rupert in the library, and came out radiant and looking ten years younger in his pride and joy. And then it leaked out, and we all knew, and that night Miss Kate told me she had decided to marry him because he was so good and kind.

"I feel as if I could trust him with my life," she said, "and that I shall be safe and happy; and after all, Jane, that is what marriage ought to be. I used to think a great deal about love and romance, you know, but it seems great nonsense now. Sentiment is all very well for poets, and painters, and great geniuses, who look at life quite differently to what ordinary-minded people do; and that is what I am."

Ordinary-minded! Oh, Miss Kate, Miss Kate! As I looked at the wistful face, the dark glowing eyes, the little mobile mouth, I almost laughed.

"My dear," I said, "let me beg of you not to decide hurriedly. You are so young, and life is a long road to walk when one walks it with weary feet and has nothing to look forward to. I know that Mr. Carruthers is a good and noble man, and

loves you devotedly, but how about yourself? You are very young. You don't know the strength of your own heart, your own feelings. Oh, wait, Miss Kate, and think well before you take such a step."

She shook her head. "There is no use in waiting, Jane," she said. "I have promised to marry him; the sooner it is over the better. If I stay here much longer I shall quarrel with Sir Rupert to a certainty. I despise him with all my heart. My poor mother; I don't wonder she was unhappy."

Then she laughed.

"Don't be such a solemn old Jane," she said. "Just as if one couldn't shape one's life as one wishes. I mean to be happy, and I am sure I shall. I have always been petted, spoiled, adored, you know; and John Carruthers is just the sort of man to keep on worshipping. Besides, it is much better to be loved than to love; and love—that wild, adoring, passionate, jealous, miserable nonsense one reads of in books—isn't in my line at all. I have had fancies innumerable, but never really cared for any man as I do for my dear old John. And I mean to marry him, and make him a good wife, too. So don't croak any more to me, because you are only wasting your time!"

She laughed, and kissed me, and shook her lovely soft hair about her shoulders for me to brush; but I thought there was something a little dim and wistful in the brown eyes as they looked into the mirror, and the pretty face was paler and graver than I cared to see.

"She doesn't know herself yet," I thought, as I parted the silken mass, and gently smoothed its tangled waves. "Not love—with those eyes, with that passionate, impulsive heart! Oh! if she wakes one day to find out her mistake; if, too late, she learns what love can be to a woman!"

But I said no more, for I saw that her mind was made up, and I could only pray that she might be happy in those strong and loving arms, that would soon be all she had to trust and look to for protection and shelter. Still, I could not help a sort of foreboding that came over me, and a fear that she had made a mistake—not in her choice of a husband, but in her estimate of her own capabilities as a wife.

Mr. Carruthers was an impatient lover. Well, he was close on his fortieth year, and Miss Kate was but eighteen; so I was not surprised to hear that they were to be married in two months' time.

It meant great changes. It meant that the Court was again to go back to its desolate dreariness—that horses, and carriages, and servants were again to be dismissed; that I was to lose my fifty pounds a year, and give up my young mistress' service, for Tom had decided to go to London, and insisted on my going also.

I had long since learnt that my marriage had been a mistake, but I knew I must make the best of it. If one has to carry about an aching heart, I think it is better to be a working woman than a lady. The lady must sit with folded hands, or go about among idle, chattering folks, and pretend to be joyous and lighthearted; but the other has to toil and labour, and scrub and sew, and cook and contrive, if only to keep body and soul together, and has little time for the luxury of thought, and the selfishness of sorrow.

I had a very hard time of it in London, for Tom was fast turning an idler and a drunkard, and, do what I might, I could not prevail upon him to stick to work when he got it.

He treated me worse and worse, and I fell into bad health, and for a time had to go into a hospital. When I got out and went home—if a wretched garret in an East-end street can be called home—I found that he had sold off every stick of furniture, and taken himself off goodness knows where. The only thing left was my trunk, containing a few clothes and books.

I could not believe for long that he had been so heartless; but there, when a man or woman takes to drink, there's not much morality left in them, as I've found out by experience. I did what I could for myself—washing and charring, and such like. Of course I might have appealed to Miss Kate and asked her to help me; but somehow I preferred to be independent, and work for my own living.

And this was how I came to be a caretaker, and to come across such odd people and experiences that it struck me that one day I might just as well write them all down, and see if they wouldn't make a story, of which Miss Kate forms the beginning, the centre, and the end; for it is most curious the way her life and mine kept crossing, and how, in her hour of greatest trouble—but there, I'm running on again, and so I must pull myself up and give a coherent account of my new start in life.

CHAPTER VII. THE SUICIDE.

It was through doing charring for Mr. Jefferson, a house-agent in Islington—or, rather, for his wife—that I first got a start as caretaker. He, of course, had a great deal to do with letting houses; and sometimes they would be going all to rack and ruin for want of a little care and attention, in the way of lighting fires and airing rooms. Sometimes he'd get a policeman and his wife to stay in the basements and look after them; and I'm sure I don't know what made him think of me, unless it was through his wife, who was very kind indeed to me, and knew something of my troubles. At all events, he asked me if I'd take care of a house in Stuart Terrace until it was let, and as the terms were liberal, and I should have a room rent-free, I jumped at the offer.

Mrs. Jefferson sent in some furniture for me, and, though I felt terribly lonely at first, I soon grew used to it.

What odd people used to come to see that house! And I wonder how many times I've had to trot up and down from basement to attic after them, and answer all sorts of idiotic questions, and then hear them say that they didn't like the neighbourhood, or that the rent didn't suit. Just as if these were not the very points they should have considered before coming to look at the house at all!

One winter afternoon, just as it was getting dusk, a carriage drove up, and I went to open the door, and found two ladies standing there who said they wished to see the house. So I lit the gas, and began the usual business of opening doors and showing rooms. They were quiet, pleasant-spoken ladies—sisters, and unmarried. The eldest, however, had a queer, nervous look about her which I didn't much like. Her sister told me that their guardian had lately died, and that it had been a great shock to them, as they had now to look out for a house, and manage their own affairs, which they had never done before.

Their name was Martin—the Misses Martin. Well, they seemed to like the house very much, and drove straight from there to Mr. Jefferson's, which wasn't far off, and the next day they came again and said they would take it. I was to stop until they came in, and see that the workmen did the place up, and arrange the rooms and the furniture. I must say they were very generous and very considerate; and for the next month I saw a good deal

of them, and got to like them very much. Perhaps Mrs. Jefferzon told them something about me, or they thought that, having been in service once, I shouldn't mind it again. But at last Miss Sophy, the younger, said she wanted a steady, useful, and trustworthy person to attend on her sister, and that I would just suit. Of course I accepted. I was only too glad of the chance, and having provided myself with two new gowns and some plain muslin caps and aprons, I was pleased to see that my hard life and worries hadn't yet turned me into the snuffy-looking, shabby, down-at-heel creature who is the usual type of charwoman, and caretaker.

At last the rooms were finished. Very nice they looked, and then the furniture began to arrive.

I must say I stared when I saw the enormous vans and the style of furniture that the men began to unload. Why, the pier-glasses, the sideboard, the cabinets and couches, the great four-poster beds, would have suited some Hyde Park mansion instead of this little terrace house.

Everything was on a large and grand scale, and no wonder, considering they'd come from a beautiful large house at Highbury, where the guardian of the two ladies had lived.

The men swore and grumbled because nothing would fit, and it was impossible to make them. So they stood the glasses up against the wall, and piled the pictures on the floor, and I had just got one room straight, with tables and chairs, when they took themselves off and said they would come next day.

I must say the place seemed even more dismal than when it was empty, and, as the short winter day drew on, the great packing cases looked ghastly in the gloom; and the huge, unwieldy pieces of furniture had a dreary and dejected appearance as if they knew they had no right there and didn't suit the place, and were sorry to be in it.

About six o'clock, when I was having some tea in the kitchen, the front door bell rang, and I ran upstairs and found Miss Martin there by herself. She had evidently driven up in a cab, as I saw one going off round the corner.

"Well, Jane," she said, "I suppose the furniture has come?"

She walked into the hall as she spoke and looked round. I followed her and opened the door of the dining-room.

"I'm afraid, Miss Martin," I said, "that

you'll have some trouble about making the furniture fit these small rooms. It has evidently come from a much larger house, and the men declare they can't get the sideboard in at all."

To my unutterable surprise, she sat down on one of the chairs and burst into tears in a weak, silly way, like a child.

"It was his sideboard," she cried. "I must have it. I can't live without seeing it every day. Tell them it must go here; it must. You are all alike. Sophy is just the same—waiting to thwart and disappoint me. He was the only one who ever loved me and understood me—and now he has gone, and no one cares, and no one does anything I wish."

I stared at her. Indeed, I thought she was extremely foolish for a grown-up woman, and hardly knew what to say. After a while she dried her tears and began to look about; but she soon commenced to cry again, for nothing was as she wanted it, and it was no use telling her it couldn't be done. She was as obstinate and as impracticable as a spoilt child. "It had been so before; it must be so again." That was the burden of her talk for a good hour or more, and I was fairly losing my patience when I heard another cab drive up, and Miss Sophy appeared.

She looked a little alarmed, I thought, as she jumped out and asked if her sister was there; and then she came in, and in a little while persuaded her to leave and go home, promising that they should both come back the first thing in the morning, and insist on the workmen doing what she wished.

Presently she drew me aside:

"I must tell you, Jane," she said, "that my sister was going to marry our guardian when he took that sudden illness, and died. It was a terrible shock to her, and threw her into this melancholy, depressed condition you now see. The doctors say that patience and change of scene will bring her round again, so you must try and put up with her. You have known trials and troubles yourself, that was why I wished to engage you if possible. But it is only right to tell you the facts of the case."

Dear Miss Sophy! If there ever was an angel upon earth, it was she; so gentle, so patient, so forbearing—and a hard time I'm sure she had of it. Miss Martin had all the money, and was so jealous of her authority and powers of management, that she made Miss Sophy come to her for

everything, and only paid her a quarterly allowance for clothing—just like a school-girl. But Miss Sophy managed her with such tact, that she never seemed to know how the real working of the household went on.

It was a full week before that furniture was put straight, and then it looked all out of place and proportion; and if they didn't cut a hole in the dining-room ceiling for the top part of that sideboard to fit, and most ridiculous it looked. But Miss Martin was delighted.

So long as she had it in the room she didn't seem to care; and she always kept the keys herself, and would let no one else fetch anything out of it.

I suppose I had been about three months in their service, when I began to see that there was something decidedly queer about my mistress. Sometimes she was in wild spirits—almost too boisterous and excited to be pleasant—at others so melancholy and depressed that it made one quite wretched to see her.

Poor Miss Sophy—she was deeply distressed about her sister, and far too innocent and good to suspect the cause. Indeed, for a long time, I never guessed what it was until one evening, in the kitchen, cook made a remark that opened my eyes.

"Have you any idea, Jane," she said, "how so many empty brandy-bottles get into the bottle cupboard?"

"No," I said. "Brandy! Why, they rarely have any upstairs. What do you mean?"

"Just come and look," she said, and she took me up to the cupboard where all the bottles were kept; and there, true enough, were piled dozens, I should think, among the empty clarets and sherries which were always taken down after being decanted.

I was fairly puzzled. The two ladies took so little wine, and very rarely had any one to dinner.

I looked at cook. There was something significant in her eye.

"Can't you guess?" she said. "Why, I hadn't been here a week before I had my suspicions. Look at missus in the morning; her eyes; the way her hand shakes; the dislike she has to breakfast; her irritability; her fits of melancholy. She's drinking herself, secretly, to death—that's what she's doing."

I felt cold and sick as I heard those words. It was the first time I had ever heard of women—ladies born and bred with no shadow of an excuse for it—

indulging in the vice of intemperance. Alas! I know now how fatally common it is, and what misery and wretchedness has come of it to many a hearth and home.

The worst of it is, as I've heard doctors say over and over again, that it's utterly impossible to reclaim women once they take to drink. Men, sometimes, do give it up and get over it; women, never.

Having once had my eyes opened to the reasons of Miss Martin's strange behaviour, and curious fits of excitement and depression, I naturally watched her more carefully. I suppose she got the brandy at different shops when she went out, for the bottles seldom had the same label, and never came from their own wine-merchant. As I watched her, it became clear to me that Miss Martin was growing steadily worse. The fits of morbid and hysterical depression were more frequent, and she began to have all sorts of curious delusions. One was, that she was very poor and that they must cut down expenses. It was no good for Miss Sophy to talk to her; she only got into a temper, and would work herself into a perfect frenzy sometimes, and frighten the gentle, timid younger sister nearly out of her senses.

She gave up the carriage, and only kept cook and myself, and whenever a bill came in, always declared she should be ruined, and made the most awful fuss over it; and yet day by day there would go five or six shillings for that hateful brandy, and she would steal down at night with the empty bottles and hide them away in that cupboard, and imagine, I suppose, that we were all such fools that we thought they grew and multiplied of their own accord.

If it hadn't been for Miss Sophy I don't think I could have stayed on, I took such a dislike to Miss Martin, and I so hated the sly, secret way she went about her actions, and the life she led that sweet, patient sister. But I put up with it for six months, when a sudden end came to the whole affair.

One summer evening cook was upstairs dressing, and I came into the kitchen to get some hot water. As I opened the door I found that something—a weight as of a heavy figure—lay behind, and prevented it going back. I felt a little bit nervous and queer.

"Gracious!" I thought, "if it's Miss Martin!"

I held the handle in my hand and stood there in the passage, hesitating as to

whether I should force the door back or not, when suddenly I felt a damp, cold sensation in my foot. I looked, and, to my horror, saw that I was standing in a pool of blood that was trickling from under the door. Then I was scared. I ran up the stairs and straight to cook's room and told her, and she turned as white as a sheet; but I couldn't induce her to come down and see what had happened.

"You'd better tell Miss Sophy," she said.

And so at last I went to the drawing-room and said I was afraid something had happened, and would she like to come down and see for herself. Poor thing, she looked at me so pitifully.

"Oh, Jane," she said very low and frightened, "is it—is it my sister?"

And I said: "Yes, miss. I'm afraid she's hurt herself."

Well, she summoned up courage, and we went downstairs. It was still quite light in the passage, and there was that dreadful dark stream flowing silently, slowly, along over the white stones.

We tried to get the door open; but it was very difficult, for we were terribly afraid of hurting Miss Martin, who seemed to be lying right across the entrance. At last there was space enough for me to squeeze through; but, oh! I shall never forget to my dying day the horrible sight; for there lay my mistress, stretched across the floor, and the light from the fire fell right across her white face and her glazed eyes, and on the carving-knife still clenched in her right hand.

She was stone dead, and her throat was cut from ear to ear.

SHANGHAI, FROM A BEDROOM WINDOW.

My bedroom window in the *Hôtel des Colonies*, Shanghai, is an excellent post of observation. The large French doors can be thrown back, and an easy-chair placed so as to command the street below. It is not a wide thoroughfare, nor yet a pretty one, but one in much request. It is one of those cross streets which lead directly into the Chinese quarter from the river frontage—the wide and picturesque Yang-tse Road, where most of the European places of business are situated. Another busy street cuts it at right angles just above the hotel, and from my window I obtain a good view up and down both.

I have not to sit long before my interest is aroused. The Jinricksha men are the most prominent feature in the street below. The Jinricksha—colloquially, ricksha—is something like a miniature dog-cart, capable of holding only one, and pulled by a man instead of a horse. It is at once the Chinese cab, omnibus, and tram in one. A long line of these rickshas and their drivers stretches from the hotel down the road in a kind of extended sandwich of men and vehicles. The men are uninteresting in appearance, and lounge about in the most indifferent fashion. At a casual glance they appear lazy and unenergetic, though really they are nothing of the kind. I could not help noticing one fellow, clad in a dirty garment, like a superannuated horse-rug, and with a pair of brown, knotted legs, innocent of any covering whatsoever. He looked such an idle vagabond, and loafed about with such an expression of vacant indifference on his face, that I could not help taking particular notice of him. First he seated himself lazily on the shafts of his ricksha, then he rose and leant against the wall, so as to yawn more at his ease. Then he scratched his head placidly, and glanced three or four times up and down the street. Nothing of interest meeting his gaze, he yawned again, expectorated on the pavement, and commenced scratching one leg with the toe of the other. After a moment or two he sat himself down on the pavement, threw a stone feebly at a passing dog, yawned again, and set up a low whistle. But at that moment a European happened to come out of the hotel, and beckoned for a ricksha. Quicker than the greasiest of any greased lightning that ever flashed, my ricksha man harnessed himself to his vehicle, and with one gigantic bound, projected himself across the street. He was before all the others, and deservedly secured the prize.

The competition between these men is very great, and their anxiety to gain a fare astonishing. A European has only to appear at the entrance of the hotel, and a cloud of rickshas and their drivers hovers round in excited competition. When one walks away, it is with an escort of half-a-dozen. There was one man in a green coat who followed my companion and myself about pertinaciously, watching our every movement with hungry eyes, and seemingly resolved to gain our patronage at any cost. He was a veritable shadow to both of us; he haunted us; he filled our cup of enjoy-

ment with bitterness. If we stopped a moment, undecided which way to turn, down he would swoop upon us and offer his services with discomposing intensity; if my companion pointed out to me some particular building or subject, the man in the dirty green coat would take it as a signal, and bear down upon us with a wild whoop of triumph. We were afraid to cough, to wink, to raise a finger, for every time we did so the ricksha man would gather himself up and swoop down upon us with an indomitable perseverance that was maddening.

We tried to dodge him round corners, to distance him by speed; but all to no purpose. We remonstrated with him, we even went so far as to swear at him; but to everything he replied in the same strain, "Wantchee ricksha?" But at last we found a method of tiring out even his pertinacity. We took not the slightest notice of him whatsoever. We indulged in unrestrained gesture and animated conversation, and when he came bearing down upon us, acted as though there was no such thing as a ricksha man in a disreputable green coat in existence.

We looked through him and over him; trod on the shafts of his vehicle when he put them in our way, and when he uttered his unchanging formula, assumed a vacant expression of countenance, and pretended not to hear. We regarded the prospect through him, and flourished our sticks in dangerous proximity to his person, as though unaware of his presence. It was a hard, hard struggle, but we conquered in the end. Time after time he essayed to make a stand against our frigidity, but in vain; and finally, after making a last effort, stood and cursed us with all the bitterness of defeat, and turned his back upon us for ever.

Another class of men, who devote their energies to the conveyance of the public, can be seen passing to and fro all day long beneath my bedroom window. These are the wheelbarrow-men, peculiar to the north, and not found in Southern China. Their vehicle is a curious contrivance—a species of heavy wheelbarrow with a raised centre. It is something like a miniature one-wheeled Irish jaunting-car, pushed from behind by a man instead of being pulled by a horse. The raised centre serves as a back, the body of the barrow being the seat; the occupants sitting back to back. These vehicles are mostly patronised by the poorer classes; the fare being very cheap. Exceedingly

clumsy in appearance, they jolt most terribly, and squeak as they move on at a snail's pace; but notwithstanding this, they are largely patronised by the Chinese.

The coolies, carrying burthens at either end of a stout bamboo pole, constitute another class which constantly attracts my attention. Their name is legion, and their burthens are legion. It is astonishing what a weight a Chinaman can carry on his shoulders, and what a diversity of articles. Building stone, bricks, tea, rice, boxes of all sorts, water, articles for sale, packing-cases—all is fish that comes to the coolie's net. The bearers trot along with their peculiar shuffle, constantly crying out their notes of warning to the passers-by, apparently unconscious that they are performing feats which a very Hercules might hesitate to attempt. Now a long string of ten or twelve comes by in Indian file, laden, perhaps, with rice, each one with an ordinary pack-horse's load. Now half-a-dozen, harnessed to a huge block of granite, struggle past, toiling and straining like so many working bullocks. Now a heap of light cargo—boxes, paper-lanterns, or something of the kind—comes bobbing along with an invisible man attached—as evidenced by a voice sounding hollowly from the midst of the load. Then there staggers by a man laden with long bars of iron and steel for the blacksmith, clanking dismally like Marley's ghost, and knocks the end of his load against the ricksha, whose owner is temporarily engaged in witnessing a dog-fight. Some of the paint is scraped off, and then there ensues a partial stoppage and a sudden babel of voices, until a native policeman happens to loaf by, when peace reigns once again.

The bamboo is a cherished possession of the Chinese—an ordinary coolie without one would be a hollow mockery. Although perhaps not in actual use, he always has one with him ready for emergencies; and if by some extraordinary chance he has not, and one should be required, give him ten seconds, and from some unknown source he will procure an assortment of twenty.

These coolies who carry burthens have a peculiar habit of calling out "Hi! hi!" at every step, to warn the passers-by of their approach; and this becomes such second nature with them, that even when they are resting they still keep up the same monotonous chant. It is rather strange to hear a coolie, resting on a doorstep or even walking without a burthen at all, calling out "Hi! hi!" dismally. The first time I

heard one doing this I thought he must have injured himself, and was in need of assistance, so I stopped to see what was the matter. But he evidently thought that I had felonious designs of some kind, for he hastily picked up his bamboo and made off.

Women and children carrying babies strapped on their backs are another class of pedestrians that continually attract my notice as I sit at my bedroom window. The number of babies I can see is something appalling. Not only has every woman one strapped to her back, but the little girls playing in the streets in most instances have the same appendage in the shape of an infant brother or sister. The nonchalance and ease with which they bear their burthens is very remarkable. They engage in the ordinary games of childhood with as much zest as though they had no such thing as a forty-pound baby saddled on them. If, in the ardour of playing, their charge gets disarranged, the girls simply give themselves a jolt, and shake it back to its proper position. I can see half-a-dozen of these immature nurses playing together, with some of the babies seemingly so disarranged as to be in imminent peril of their lives. And yet heads may hang down hazardously, bandages become loosened, and little bodies be all twisted awry, but there is never any harm done. Just in the very nick of time the player stops for a moment, and by one miraculous wriggle, shakes her burthen back to its proper position, and resumes her game with childish unconcern. And a further remarkable feature is that the baby never cries, even under the most aggravating circumstances. It may be hanging limply, and have half its body trailing forlornly down, but it does not seem to mind it in the least. After the shake that rearranges it, it comes up smiling, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to be in peril of its life twenty times a day.

The most interesting sight in the street below is that afforded by the numerous processions which, every now and again, pass beneath my bedroom window. On an average, I should say, one passes every quarter of an hour—some large and some small—marriage and funeral processions; religious processions; and those formed by the retinue of guards-of-honour attending a mandarin. I can always hear one long before I catch a glimpse of it. An unearthly banging of

gongs and clashing of cymbals heralds its approach, accompanied by shouting and some advance ripples of excitement. Then it slowly makes its appearance—a long, disorganised line of musicians; banner-bearers; men with coloured lanterns; others with grotesque-looking frescoes, representing mythical personages; mimic soldiers, armed with wooden halberds and shields; coolies banging gongs; and lastly a long tail of scaramouches and vagabonds doing nothing in particular beyond looking disreputable and uncleanly. If it is a mandarin procession the soldiers are real ones, the banging and shouting more deafening, and the great man himself can be descried in the heart of the train riding an unkempt pony with a string of bells jingling round its neck, or else reposing snugly in a covered-in sedan-chair. Funeral processions are to be distinguished by the white draperies of the walkers, and the priests in long bleached garments that generally accompany them; marriage processions by the flaring crimson which is the emblem of Hymen and his festivities.

Some of the processions, however, are of the meanest description—perhaps not more than two or three coolies, one bearing a coloured lantern, one a gong, and one a banner. A procession of two or three, such as this, will march down the centre of the street with as much assumption as a full-sized one of fifty.

I am highly amused to see the way in which the average ricksha coolie acts when a procession happens to meander by. A second thoroughfare intersects the one my window commands, and this crossing is a spot generally fraught with misfortune and difficulty for the numerous processions as they go by. Down comes a ricksha man from the cross road, and, before he can stop, is in the heart of the procession, spreading disorganisation right and left. But he never budges or gives way an inch. He may have a five-cent fare of a dirty old Chinaman in his vehicle, whose business is of the least importance; but, all the same, the ricksha man as little brooks a stoppage as though the well-being of the empire depended on his fare reaching his destination within a certain time. Down he swoops, uttering stentorian notes of warning, and then—as the procession never dreams of taking the slightest notice of him, but marches on with all the solemnity the occasion demands—he finishes up by projecting himself into its midst, throwing the whole body into dire confusion. Then

of course he lifts up his sweet voice, and the procession follows suit, and for five minutes nothing is heard but shrill voices and vituperation. Other ricksha men join in; strong ripples of excitement and impatience agitate the rear ranks of the procession, forced to keep in line and panting to join in the fray. Either contending party looks as if he would rather die than budge an inch, when, in nine cases out of ten, the procession surlily opens, and, with a whoop of triumph, the victorious ricksha man darts through and is off.

The vehicles which pass every now and again attract my notice in the intervals of procession-viewing. The country round Shanghai being flat, and the European settlement having good roads, one enjoys the novelty of seeing plenty of carriages in the street, which is not the case further south. Quite a number pass in front of my post of observation, mostly private conveyances belonging to Europeans. There are no horses—at most, one or two—Mongolian ponies being the substitute. Some very pretty equipages pass my window, most of them being toy broughams with windows all round, instead of wooden panels, looking wonderfully light and graceful. With a pair of well-matched cream or dapple-grey ponies, and neatly-uniformed coolie coachman and groom, they look charming. Such a one her fairy godmother might have bestowed on Cinderella to go to the King's ball in.

Dog-carts and buggies are the only other kind of vehicles I see. Every now and again one shoots past to the dismay of the pedestrians—for the average Chinaman thinks the centre of the road just as good a place to walk in as the footpath. One dog-cart that passed—quite a spruce affair—was manned and officered by young Chinese bloods. The driver was evidently an exquisite of the first water, and the overpowering air with which he held reins and whip, and conversed with an equally exquisite companion, was a matter of admiration to all beholders. Gloved and shawled, cigar in mouth, striped rug about their knees, the two looked condescendingly imposing, and even reflected lustre on the groom sitting with folded arms behind.

There is a rickety old waggon which passes my window twice every day, and seems to ply regularly in a certain direction. It groans and creaks as it lumbers by, and is, I think, the most ramshackle vehicle I ever saw. The horse harnessed to it is a very Orson for hairiness, but possesses

a curious interest in my eyes in consequence of an adventure of which it was the hero. Just underneath my window a hawker had left a basket of vegetables on the footpath, whilst he transacted some business relative to the purchase of carrots by an old woman with one eye. Orson happened to clatter by at the time, and his eye lighted on the basket. With surprising promptitude he made a sudden dive to the side-walk, thrust his head into the basket, and resumed his way with a good-sized turnip in his mouth. It did not take a minute to accomplish, and as the driver or any of the passers never thought of taking any steps in the matter, I suppose it was quite a matter-of-fact and ordinary occurrence. When Orson passed by on his return, I noticed that he kept a look-out, and turned his head enquiringly from side to side; but a second chance of impromptu refreshment did not offer itself, and so, shaking his heavy head dismally, he resumed his ordinary stolid look, and slowly slouched out of sight.

In the foregoing few paragraphs I have not made mention of one-half the persons and things that attract my attention, and arouse my interest. There are many other classes of pedestrians that come under my eye. Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, and Americans—from the foreign consul down to the junior clerk; from the epauleted navy captain to the free-and-easy bluejacket. Native hawkers; occasional Japs, undersized and dark, but prepossessing from the mere fact of not wearing a pigtail; native merchants; coolies; servants; shopkeepers; porters; loafers; and other street-throngers, whose business or occupation can only be a matter of conjecture—all these crowd the footpaths and roadway, and pass and re-pass in never-ending streams.

I will close this paper by jotting down a note about a peculiar national custom which I have observed from my snug look-out. It is this. The ordinary Chinamen, as a rule, have their cherished pigtail loosely tied-up in a knot at the back of the head. This is in order to keep it out of harm's way. But when a Celestial meets a friend, before he stops to exchange the ordinary greetings, he gives his pigtail a poke, so as to bring it down his back again. The other follows suit; and whilst the two talk, the pigtail hangs down, and is not replaced until they part.

It is considered the height of impoliteness to converse with the pigtail looped

up; nor is it etiquette for servants to have theirs tied-up when attending on their masters.

It is a peculiar custom, but not a very troublesome one. One poke at the pigtail, and down it comes; and then, when the owner of it has learnt all the news—heard about the new baby at Pok Ung Lung's round the corner, and the death of the yellow dog belonging to his cousin, who lives in the street of Everlasting Delights—and has discussed the market price of rice, and made a remark about the weather, he takes his leave, and by one miraculous twist has got his pigtail tied up as fast as if it were held by a dozen hairpins and combs.

THE CHILDREN'S BREAD.

WHAT steps can we take to ensure that poor children shall have, at least, one good meal during the day? This is an important question, which has for some time attracted public attention. A solution of the problem was attempted by the promoters of the Penny Dinner scheme. Two objections, however, were raised against this movement. First, that the accounts of the children's privations were very much exaggerated; second, that the dinners would cost more than one penny, and, therefore, to sell them for less would serve to encourage improvidence and parental neglect.

It is but too true that a large number of children often attend school without having had any breakfast or dinner. They are too weak and exhausted to compete with their better-fed school-fellows, and in some cases the education bestowed upon them seems almost wasted. "The Times," of March third, 1887, roughly estimates the number of these hungry little ones at fifty thousand. In a Board School near King's Cross, the figures given were three hundred and forty-nine, or seventeen per cent. of the children attending the school. At Regent Street, Deptford, out of seven hundred and thirty children, sixty-four had had no breakfast on January the second, and seventy-three no dinner on the previous day. At Tower Street, Seven Dials, out of six hundred and thirty-nine, the numbers were seventy-six and fifty-nine, and at Drury Lane, out of six hundred and one, they were fifty-one and fifty-eight respectively.

It has been proved, by experiment, that the cost of material is sevenpence for every one hundred dinners. When the premises

are rent free, and "plant" is provided, the pence of one hundred and twenty children will not only cover expenses, but allow of a small profit towards the "plant." In Birmingham, under the same conditions, halfpenny dinners have been found to be self-supporting. At Cook's Ground, Chelsea, two hundred and sixty-two dinners were sold in one day, "and considerable profit was made every day."

Sir Henry Peek provided both education and dinners for the children attending his schools at Rousdon, in Devonshire, at a charge of fivepence per week. The fees were paid in advance, and thus the managers of the dinner kitchen had the advantage of knowing for how many children they were to prepare meals during the ensuing week. The children were taught to prepare the food themselves under the superintendence of the school-master's wife.

In the cookery centres, established by the London School Board, the kitchens are fitted up with appliances suitable for a working man's home, with the addition of a gas-stove. Here the children are taught to cook a number of cheap and tasty dishes. These lessons might easily be supplemented by the preparation of penny dinners. The plan would be productive of much good. The children would not only enjoy a well-cooked and nourishing meal, but would have learnt how to prepare it. Parents who are out at work all day, and who cannot provide their children with food, will be glad for them to purchase dinners at the school. And the gain to the children themselves is obvious. Instead of spending the dinner-hour in the streets, with rough and sometimes questionable companions, these little ones will be having a comfortable hot meal in the schoolroom.

At Gateshead, the children are not only taught how to cook, but also how to serve.

"The plan is: at twelve o'clock so many children are told off to fetch in the table-cloths and put them on the desks—we always use table-cloths—then they fetch in the plates; and then the dinner is fetched in. Generally a lady and one or two of the teachers superintend. The teachers take it in turns. The whole thing is over in twenty-five minutes. As they come out they carry their spoons with them and drop them into a basket, and so many children are told off to clear up the plates. The whole thing is done in half an hour."*

* "Charity and Food." Longmans, Green, and Company. 1887.

The real difficulty lies not in the preparation and serving of dinners, but in their distribution. This is indeed a matter which requires much discrimination and tact on the part of the voluntary helpers. If the plan is to be a real and lasting success, it must be made self-supporting. Every individual case should be carefully enquired into, in order to prevent improvidence or neglect on the part of the child's natural guardians. If rags and dirt are to be the only guarantee required, the Penny Dinner movement, instead of being a blessing, will only serve to encourage a spirit of pauperism.

At the time when free tickets were distributed broadcast, a boy, who had a decent mother, deliberately tore up the sleeves of his jacket in order to qualify himself for admission to the dinner kitchen.

Another instance of the mistakes often made by charitable, but superficial observers, is given in the following story, which appeared in the "Charity Organisation Reporter," December the thirteenth, 1884:

"A certain poor widow, hearing of a place near by where children's dinners were being given for a halfpenny each, sent her three boys there one day duly provided with their halfpence. Two of them rushed off just as they were, but the third was captured and subjected to a little extra scrubbing for the occasion. The consequence was that, because he looked so nice and tidy, the lady who was officiating felt sure he could get a good dinner at home, and refused him the meal which his unwashed brothers were permitted to enjoy."

If, however, free tickets are discontinued, who is to feed the children who are half-starved, and yet have no money to produce? Take one instance. Among the children who carry coppers in their hands with which to purchase some food, appears a little pale-faced child without a penny. He asks for a dinner! What is to be done? "The child must not be sent away hungry," decides the benevolent distributor of the meal, and, yielding to a generous impulse, she gives the child a dinner. This will happen again and again, for the child is learning the easy but degrading lesson of dependence upon charity, and the parent is relieved of responsibility with regard to his child's support.

But while, on the one hand, it is not desirable to release careless or intemperate

guardians from their parental duties, there are some exceptional cases where the gift of dinners is really necessary—at least, for a time. As a rule, however, decent parents do not obtrude their wants upon public attention, but prefer to struggle on in their own way. They are unwilling to throw themselves upon the uncertain generosity of alms-givers, and endeavour to support their families by the exercise of thrift and self-denial. In these instances it is true economy to supply the present need, and thus prevent the families from being compelled to come upon the rates.

Among the children to whom dinners must be given when needed, may be reckoned those whose fathers from no fault of their own, but from depression of trade or ill-health, have been unable for a time to obtain work, and consequently have earned no wages. Children who have no fathers, and whose mothers are left without means of providing for their young families, who cannot contribute any earnings of their own, must also be fed.

The London School Board has no power to feed these children at the expense of the rates; and this is much to be regretted, for the following reasons.

(1). Enquiry could be made by school managers into cases requiring immediate help. In these instances, food could be given—as in Edinburgh—on condition of regular attendance. This would secure the daily presence in school of that class with whom the Board Officers have most trouble.

(2). The children being better fed would be able to learn more, and would earn a higher grant from Government for proficiency.

(3). Children and parents would be brought into personal contact with managers and other kindly-disposed persons, who would take an interest in their welfare.

(4). Managers, as an official body, would have the power to censure careless and intemperate guardians.

When parents cannot afford to buy food for their children, it follows as a natural consequence that they are also unable to pay the school fees. When the school-money is not forthcoming, it is customary for the parents to make application for the remission of fees on the ground of poverty. They are then required to appear before divisional members of the London School Board, at the "Notice B" meetings of Managers held at the various Board Schools, to show cause why the money is not paid.

Managers might be furnished from time to time by teachers with the names of children who appear to be suffering from hunger, but who cannot bring a penny for a meal. When the parents, or guardians, appear before the managers with respect to the remission of their children's school fees, they might at the same time be submitted to a strict enquiry into the reasons why the children are not provided with food. The "officers" who visit the homes of the children will be able to give the managers much information respecting the resources of the family. In some instances it will be found that the applicant for remission is in need of advice as well as relief. Not long ago, a man who had evidently just been enjoying a pipe, appeared before the Committee of Managers. On being asked why his children's fees were not paid, he answered that he had no money. "And yet you can afford to purchase tobacco," was the reply. It had not occurred to the man that he might, by a little self-sacrifice on his part, render himself independent of the rates. Careless, or idle parents, thus summoned before an official body, would learn, probably for the first time, that by wilfully neglecting their children under the age of fourteen they have broken the law, and are liable, upon conviction, to a punishment of six months' imprisonment with hard labour.

Again, an intemperate parent could be warned that by habitually spending in intoxicants the money which should support his family, he is infringing the law. He will most likely be surprised to hear that, by thus throwing his children upon the rates, he renders himself liable to conviction and punishment with hard labour for one month.

It will be easily understood that it will be necessary for managers to have their authority strengthened by power to summon before magistrates, those who refuse to attend the meetings and still continue to deprive their children of food.

Among the various and many schemes suggested for supplying indigent, but non-pauper children with the food they require, that of establishing Day Industrial Schools deserves our serious and earnest consideration.

In 1876, the "Education Amendment Act" gave authority to School Boards to establish Day Industrial Schools, and to obtain for them the certificate of the Secretary of State. But while these schools are needed to supplement Elementary Day

Schools, it is not intended that they should take the place of Certified Industrial Schools. They, however, differ from both in the following particulars. In Day Industrial Schools the children receive a training in manual labour in addition to their ordinary school work, and they are fed during the day, which is not the case in Elementary Day Schools, where intellectual instruction alone is given. At the same time, they are not lodged and clothed and entirely supported at the public expense, as in the case of Certified Industrial Schools. The parents are made to contribute towards the cost of the teaching and food bestowed upon their children. Of course it is not an easy matter to get this money out of the pockets of idle and intemperate guardians; and the Liverpool magistrates have avoided this difficulty by adopting the following ingenious plan.

When committing a child to a Day Industrial School, the parent is ordered, without any enquiry as to his ability, to contribute two shillings—that is the highest sum the law allows—to pay for his child's support and training. Should he be unable to pay—as most likely will be the case—he is directed to apply to the Poor Law Guardians of his parish. As, in his default, they are liable to the payment, they use their utmost endeavours to obtain the money from the parent.

It has been urged against this scheme that the cost of feeding the children at these schools will—although partly defrayed by industrial work—exceed the weekly fees paid for them at elementary schools. This is true; but the children who are thus habitually neglected by their parents, are likely to grow up idle and lawless members of society. Left to themselves, with no control but their own inclinations, there is nothing to prevent them from developing criminal propensities which will lead them to infringe the law. Then they will have to be supported entirely, for years, in a Certified Industrial School or in a prison. Surely it is cheaper in the end to give such children an industrial training which will enable them to get their own living honestly, either at home or in our colonies, and thus save them from being ruined for life.

The child by going home at night from the Day Industrial School, will communicate to his home the lessons of morality and industry he has learned during the day, and will probably awaken the dormant affections and energies of his natural guardians.

This would not be the case if he had been sent to a Certified Industrial School, and thus entirely severed from all home ties. At the same time the careless and intemperate guardians of children will be compelled to support them, and yet will be unable to make any profit out of their labours.

It is evident that a plan which thus forces neglectful parents to provide for their offspring, and also secures the future well-being of the children, cannot fail to be beneficial to the community at large.

A FORLORN HOPE.

A COMPLETE STORY.

"Now," said my friend, Monsieur de St. Blancat, as, after a long climb, we halted on a rocky spur overlooking the river Ariège, "now, look round you, and give me your opinion, as an English officer, of the strategic importance of the point on which we stand."

Thus challenged, I looked critically right and left, at the tumultuous torrent which washed the base of the precipitous rock on which we stood; at the mountain road which wound painfully beside the stream up the gorge; at the wooded steep which shut us in on every side, limiting our view of the road to a few hundred yards. Then I replied:

"The place is inaccessible, except by a path difficult to find, and more difficult to follow; it is admirably defended by the river; it commands, at an easy range, a considerable length of the road; I should, therefore, say it would be a post of incomparable value in the improbable contingency of an enemy marching upon Mas d'Azil; providing that an efficient force could be brought here, and a small fort built on the site of that ruined hut."

Monsieur de St. Blancat smiled: "It was not an improbable contingency which suggested my question; but an historical fact. Our little town of Mas d'Azil has passed through the danger you speak of; and, in her time of need, it was a force no more or less efficient than four stout-hearted peasants who stationed themselves here, and held at bay for three days an army of fourteen hundred men. Let us sit down in the ruined hut where they stored their ammunition and provisions, and where they watched through three nights of peril, and I will tell you one of the many interesting legends of the

Pyrenees. I cannot affix to the story any exact day or year; for, though these are the days of enlightenment and free education, the story of the defence of Mas d'Azil is not to be treated irreverently as a mere fact which one learns in class, and catalogues with other facts. We know, and this suffices, that it was more than a century and a half ago, when the King was old and his counsellors were evil; when the name of Huguenot was a brand of infamy; and when those who would not deny it were forced to take refuge in lonely mountain dwellings, hiding until such time as the King's troops should track them out and give them, at the sword's point, the choice of conversion or death."

Then he told me the following story.

Tradition does not indicate more clearly than this the date when the Maréchal de Thémines received a royal commission to march as secretly as possible southward from Toulouse, across the plains, to ascend the narrow valley of the Ariège, and to attack and subdue the stronghold of Mas d'Azil, where the evil weeds of heresy and schism had found shelter, and were flourishing in insolent security.

The march would be long and difficult, and the fortress—locked among the mountains—would be no easy prey; but the King's troopers were stout veterans, and, though their leader was the poorest of drawing-room braves, not a man among them doubted for a moment of the issue of the short, sharp campaign.

For there were no soldiers and no arms among the Huguenot mountaineers, and the Vicomte de St. Blancat, an ancestor of mine, a staunch Huguenot, who looked upon himself as the lord and protector of the little town, lived two days' journey farther in the mountains on the Spanish frontier, so that, before he could be summoned and appear, all would be over with Mas d'Azil.

Secretly as the preparations were made, however, vague rumours got abroad and floated southward, stirring men's minds uneasily, though without gaining general credence. In fact, there was only one man who was so far moved by the distant mutterings of danger, as to turn his thoughts to the possibility of defence. This man was Jean Duson, who lived in the bourg of Carlat le Comte, three leagues northward from Mas d'Azil.

Jean Duson was a man of mark among his fellows. In his youth he had served the Marquis de Foix, and during the great war in Flanders had seen much of soldiering. When peace was made, he had come back to his native village, bringing with him a little daughter of ten years old, whose Flemish mother slept in some northern graveyard, and who seemed more than half a foreigner to the numerous cousins of every degree in the bourg of Carlat le Comte. She was tall and fair, while the village girls were small and dark; her eyes were blue and theirs were brown; the costume she wore looked strange, and the dialect she spoke sounded outlandish to them. Nevertheless, for kinship's sake, she was welcomed, and presently, for her own sake, she was beloved.

It was now eight years since Jean Duson had changed the sword for the ploughshare; but he had not forgotten his old life, nor his tales of battle and adventure; while Jeanne had grown into a lovely maiden, with whom half the lads in the village, and notably her three cousins—Gérard, Maurice, and Jean Baptiste Duson—were head over ears in love.

It would seem that Mademoiselle Jeanne was not without a spice of coquetry; for, until the memorable summer in which these incredibly alarming rumours were afloat, she had treated all her devotees with a provoking equality of indifference—excepting her cousin Gérard, and to him she had been positively harsh.

It is impossible to say if this harshness were the cause or the effect of Gérard's conduct; the fact remains that he and his brothers were the black sheep, not only of the hamlet, but of the whole neighbourhood. Many infringements of the forest laws were vaguely laid to their charge, and it was also whispered that some of their nocturnal escapades had a higher stake than the red deer or small game, and that when the contrabandists ran their risky way to and fro across the Spanish frontier, they often found friendly help from the three tall brothers Duson in the bourg of Carlat le Comte; and these rumours could not possibly be favourable to Gérard as a pretender to the hand of the well-dowered belle of the village.

Now while the good folk of Mas d'Azil were doing their best to deal ostrich-fashion with the alarms which came drifting southward on the breath of rumour, Jean Duson was growing more and more

convinced that at the present juncture the strength of a wise man was not "to sit still."

Not being loquacious, however, he soon gave up the attempt to argue his fellow-villagers of Carlat le Comte into the same frame of mind; but he took down a couple of long fowling-pieces which he had hanging against the wall, and while he was examining and cleaning them, he unburdened his mind to his daughter of the bold plan he was forming, and of the need there was to find a few more volunteers who would stand in the forefront of the danger, and lay down, if needful, their lives for their brethren.

"Thou seest, child," he explained, "if Monsieur le Vicomte would march his men down to the opening of the gorge, and post them there with his four great field-pieces ready for action, we should be safe. But Monsieur le Vicomte is over cautious; he says the King's troops are merely en route from Toulouse to Perpignan; and that any warlike preparations on his part would justly provoke punishment. He will only realise his error when Monsieur le Maréchal has already entered the valley. Then it will take a messenger thirty-six hours to bear the news to him; another thirty-six hours will be required to march his men to Mas d'Azil—three whole days—time enough for the soldiery to raze the town to the ground; unless—"

Then, as her father unfolded a great scheme over which he was meditating, Jeanne's face turned from white to red, and from red to white; her bosom heaved; her breath came quick and short, and the tears ran unheeded down her burning cheeks.

"But you cannot do it alone," she said, "and who will help you?"

"Yes," repeated her father, "who will help me?—that is the question. Whose trust in my leadership and in the good cause is great enough to make him a volunteer in such a forlorn hope?"

To which doubting words Jeanne gave no reply.

The next day, as Gérard Duson was passing his uncle's house—which he had now for many months done with averted eyes—he stopped short with a start of surprise, and not unpleasant surprise, either. His cousin Jeanne, who had avoided him persistently for some time, had called to him from the open doorway.

"I am on my way to Mas d'Azil," he said in reply. "Do you want anything from there?"

"I want something," she said, "but not from Mas d'Azil. Are you in a great hurry?"

"I am in no hurry, Jeanne; if you want anything of me I am at your service—you have only to ask."

But when he had come in through the door and stood in patient expectation, she was silent, only looking at him with anxious, questioning eyes, and he had full leisure to observe that her face was paler than usual. "You are thinking," he said, presently, "of what you said to me in the vineyard last October. I have not forgotten it either; you have not spoken to me since, and I do not suppose you have changed the opinion you had of me then. I, too, feel still as I spoke then. However, we will put that aside for the moment. I see you are in some trouble, and, perhaps, I can help you—if it is so, speak out; I shall not say 'Jeanne, you treated me with scorn when I asked something of you;' nor shall I put any price on my service."

He spoke gravely and proudly, as if, though suffering from a sense of injustice received, he would not avail himself of this opportunity of vindicating himself.

"You are very generous, Gérard," she said, timidly. "I have always thought that of you; what I am going to ask of you is a great thing. Will you do a great deal if I ask you?"

"I will try," he answered, simply. "I wish you would tell me what it is, and not speak any longer in riddles."

"And it is not for me—at least, only for me among many."

"I have promised to try, whatever it is."

"It is a matter of life and death."

"I have risked my life often; once more will be no great matter."

"Yes," cried Jeanne, her eagerness overpowering her doubts at last, "you have risked your life more than once for a few paltry head of game; you have run your neck into a noose for the few francs you could earn by contraband dealing. You and your brothers have proved your courage in a worthless cause, and now, not to one, but to all three, the opportunity is offered of utilising your experience and contempt of difficulty and danger in the defence of your home and your own kin. The attack on us is certain—though those who ought to be preparing to meet it will not believe so. My father is alive to the peril of delay; he is only in want of two or three able volunteers to enable him to

hold the mouth of the gorge against the King's troops, until M. le Vicomte can be summoned. My father is an old soldier, he would not undertake this if he did not feel sure of the result. Mas d'Azil and the valley will be saved—those who save must not think of themselves. It is a hero's part that is offered to you."

"We will go with him," said Gérard, looking full into her flashing eyes. "I will talk to Maurice and Jean Baptiste. Jean Baptiste has a nasty cough; the mother is unhappy about it, and wants him not to expose himself any more on the mountains at night; before he begins to nurse himself he must make one more sally. Now good morning, my cousin, unless you have something more to say."

"No, there is nothing more, except that I am glad you bear no malice about what I said in the vineyard. I am afraid I was a little hard."

"So you were," replied Gérard, simply.

"I shall never say such hard things of you again."

"Thank you, Jeanne," he answered. Then, without any more words, he went out, taking along the road to Mas d'Azil a burden of thoughts, in which speculations as to his uncle's plan of defence outweighed conjectures respecting Jeanne's change of manner towards him.

So it came to pass that Jean Duson found efficient help to carry out his design, and after considerable consultation and preparation, everything was planned, provided, and put in order.

I cannot tell you how often the Dusons reconnoitred the valley before they fixed on this rock on which we are seated as the most advantageous position they could man, and decided on storing their home-cast bullets and all the powder they could collect, with provisions for several days, in this hut. Nor do I know if they sent out spies, nor how they gained information concerning the march of the attacking force; all I can tell you is that they were here ready when the great moment came—when the head of Maréchal de Thémènes's column turned that curve which you see to your right, and advanced jauntily and unconcernedly as men might advance on their way to certain victory. In twenty paces, as you see, the first line was within range of four well-aimed guns which lay hidden in the brushwood up above the further bank of the river.

Softly the elder Duson gave the word. There was a puff of smoke; a sharp report

echoed from side to side of the valley. A cry of angry dismay, mingled with groans of agony, rose from the road; and four men, out of the two front lines, rolled in the dust, stricken down by unerring marksmen.

The gay march halted in confusion, and every man took a general survey of the surroundings. There was the silent, empty road winding onwards; the lonely, wooded steeps on either side; the river swollen by the melted snow. The smoke had been driven down the summer wind, and no living thing was visible. Meanwhile the little band had reloaded, and taken fresh aim; the confusion of surmise and vituperation was interrupted by a second volley, and once more four stalwart troopers fell mortally wounded. It was obvious now that some one was concealed on the further side of the river; but how many, or whereabouts in the masses of brushwood which covered the rocks, was not so easy to discern.

The officer in command of the vanguard ordered a volley to be fired in the direction of the shots. The Dusons crouched behind a breastwork of earth which they had thrown up, and, had the aim from below been faultless, instead of at random, they had nothing to fear. Before the smoke of the discharge had cleared away they fired again, with the same deadly result as before, and by that time the skirmish may be said to have fairly begun. Time after time the soldiery raked the precipice opposite with no result but expenditure of ammunition; time after time the Dusons discharged and loaded their guns—which, by the way, they had procured from Gérard's friends, the contrabandisti—each time with loss to the enemy.

When news was carried to the Maréchal—who was with the main body of the army—that the mountain was full of desperate peasants, and that the troops were being shot down like so many quails, he gave orders that the infantry should fall back, and that the cavalry should charge past the ambush.

The infantry were not sorry to carry out their part of the instructions; then the cavalry attempted their share, but as soon as they came within range of that deadly fire they fell, by twos, by threes, and by fours, till the narrow road was encumbered with wounded men and horses.

A council of war, therefore, was called; the Maréchal decided to retreat to the mouth of the valley, and halt there for the

night, and, under cover of darkness, to bring his cannon—he had three pieces—to bear upon the point from which it was now apparent that the firing proceeded.

The Dusons, on their part, saw, with the utmost thankfulness, the effect of their first day's work. While the messenger, who had been despatched to the Vicomte, had been making his way over the mountains, the invaders had not gained one foot of the valley, and were, moreover, totally ignorant of the numbers and efficiency of the force which baffled their march.

But their success did not blind them to their weakness and danger. They heard in the darkness the great field pieces being dragged into position, one shot from which would shatter their slight earthwork. So all night long they laboured to strengthen their primitive fortifications, and, at dawn, when all was still, they snatched an hour's rest.

All the following day the unequal battle went on. The gunners were shot down as they served the guns. More than once the great cannon-balls, rebounding from the rocks, did mischief to the troops; but the Dusons escaped without a graze. The second evening closed in, and again the Maréchal had to order a bivouac on the same spot.

On that second day Jean Baptiste had not been a very active warrior. His physical force had fallen far short of his courage, and he had had to retire, faint and weary, from the action long before the cannonade ceased. As he lay in the hut he bethought him that the miquelets* would, in all probability, be sent out to explore the mountain to discover their position, and to surround and destroy them.

You remember, my good friend, that you found the path which led us hither uncommonly difficult and rough; so it would be, Jean Baptiste knew, to the miquelets; nevertheless, as the path existed, there existed also a possibility that it might be found and followed; and this perilous possibility must be provided against.

When the day was over and the soldiers had again fallen back, a consultation on this important point was held, and it was decided that the course of the stream, along whose margin we climbed, must be turned out of its bed, so as to render invisible, and almost impracticable,

* Sharpshooters.

the already very little used path. "And that," said Jean Dason, "must be the work of Jean Baptiste. He has rested; we others must husband our force for a long day's fighting to-morrow."

So it was done; and by daybreak where the rugged ascent had been, a wild cataract swept its way between the roots of the evergreen oaks.

All that day the firing continued, with the same almost incredible results—remember this is a story true to the letter—but there was still at least a night and a day to pass before the Vicomte's troops could have reached Mas d'Azil, and the Dusons had observed that a considerable body of miquelets was absent from the army. It was true that the precautions of the previous night had increased their safety; but there remained the risk that, after having held out the requisite time, they might find their retreat to Carlat le Bourg cut off. Therefore, when for the third time the Maréchal ordered his force to bivouac, Gérard Dason volunteered to go and see if the way to the village were still open, while Jean and Maurice slept, and Jean Baptiste, who had again rested in the afternoon, kept watch.

Gérard's expedition was an undertaking of no small difficulty. In the dark, and at the risk of stumbling across the miquelets anywhere and at any moment, he had to make his way through obstacles which you are just now quite in the mood to appreciate. I will not attempt to describe them. It is sufficient to say that at length he safely reached the hillside on which the village stands.

A few glimmering lights told him that all was not deserted. He sought out in the dimness the big house at the end of the village, which belonged to Jean Dason. A light gleamed there; Jeanne was watching—praying for them, no doubt; perhaps her prayers had guided his perilous path just now. He would go to her and tell her that all had gone well, and that there was good hope of final success.

"It is I, Jeanne," he called out, reassuringly, when he had tapped on the door, and Jeanne, white-faced, and trembling with hope and fear, opened to him.

"I have come with good news," he went on—"we are all safe, and safe we hope to remain. Jean Baptiste is too weak to fight much; but when he has to give up, we are enough without him. By to-morrow evening the Vicomte's troops will

be at Mas d'Azil, and we shall come down to join the defence. In the meantime you must all get to the town as quickly as possible; there is a scouring party on the mountains, the village is no longer safe."

"And you," she replied, anxiously, "will it be safe for you to return if the soldiers are on the alert?"

"Yes," he replied, stoutly, "ours is the good cause, and your prayers will be with me."

"Yes, Gérard, I shall pray and watch until I see you again. May Heaven hear my prayers." Then, before he turned to go, she added: "This is no time to think of ourselves; still, I must ask you to forgive me for the angry words I spoke once, and the angry silence that I kept afterwards."

"Let us both forgive, Jeanne," he answered, promptly, "and when the time comes to speak of such things again, let me hope for a kinder answer to the question I asked you then."

She did not speak, but her pale face glowed, her sad eyes lighted up as she held out both hands to him. He came closer to her.

"Jeanne, I must not linger; Heaven be with thee, my own lass." And, as he spoke, he wrapped his strong arms round her, and pressed his betrothal kiss on her forehead. In another moment he was once more on the dark hillside, and Jeanne was alone, weeping tears of joy, and mingling her half-despairing petition with sweet thanksgivings.

If Gérard's descent from the hut had been perilous, his return was doubly so. Twice he had to evade parties of scouts, and the dawn had stolen over the sky before he reached the last precipice, down which, in default of the path, he had to scramble. Here, however, the risk was, so to speak, over; and he might scramble boldly without dreading the result of every bough that snapped or every stone that rattled.

Behind their primitive fortifications Jean Dason and Maurice had been sleeping the sleep of the weary, and Jean Baptiste, who had slept during the previous afternoon, was using every endeavour to fulfil conscientiously the office of sentinel. But his weakness overpowered him; again and again he found that his agitated thoughts were assuming the incoherent form of a dream. Suddenly he was aroused from this semi-waking state by a clatter of falling rocks. Some one was approaching;

was even now climbing over the earthwork. The miquelets had ferreted them out; it was all over with them. Ill and weary as he was he resolved to die hard. Calling the others, he levelled his gun and took deadly aim at the intruder, whom he now saw in the faint light. A cry of dismay rang out.

"My brother, what hast thou done?" and Jean Duson reached the earthwork in time to receive the wounded man in his arms.

"Gérard, Gérard!" wailed poor Jean Baptiste, "speak, thou art not badly hurt?"

His only reply was a mournful shake of the head, while his uncle endeavoured vainly to staunch the blood which flowed from a wound in his side.

"Canst thou give thy report?" the old man asked tenderly; "it were bitter to die for nothing."

"At present you can retreat," gasped the dying man; "but the miquelets are close here—they will find us without fail. You must go at once—before daylight. Twice I was nearly in their hands. You have done enough."

"We cannot go, my son, and leave you here."

"Why not?" he said, still more feebly. "I am a dead man."

"And I am an old man. A few years are all I have left. I shall not strive to save them. I shall stay here, as long as it is possible to fire a shot."

"And I," said Jean Baptiste, "who am marked out for an early death, I do not care to live with my brother's blood on my head. I stay also."

"Then Maurice must go," whispered Gérard; "the cause cannot spare us all."

So, after much urging, Maurice did go; and, as he reached Carlat le Comte in safety, the particulars of the story were by his means preserved in the village tradition.

The other Dusons died the deaths of martyrs on this very spot; for the miquelets found the way to the hut, and killed them without mercy.

When the signal was waved from this point that the troops had taken it, the army advanced with great caution and dread of other ambushes, and reached Mas d'Azil a few hours after the town had been fully prepared to receive them.

The unsuccessful blockade, however, and the terrible hardships endured by the besieged, are not part of the story I wished you to hear. It is sufficient to say that

the Dusons had not died in vain, and that the King's troops did not take Mas d'Azil.

"And Jeanne?" I asked, for I felt one touch was still wanting to the record.

"Jeanne," replied Monsieur de St. Blancat, "kept the promise she had made to her lover: that she would watch and pray till she met him again. And I am sure that the lodestar by which she shaped her course was not a forlorn hope."

FRUIT-GROWING.

Now that great expectations are being entertained respecting the profits to be derived from fruit-growing as compared with those obtainable from farming, it is permissible to point out a few considerations which may save many from cruel disappointment, or even disastrous loss.

For people who plant merely for pleasure, amusement, or ornament—as peach, almond, and mirabelle plum-trees, are often planted in shrubberies for the sake of their blossoms—and not for profit, the drawbacks and difficulties, about to be mentioned, of course are negligible circumstances.

When politicians recommend the growing of fruit as an alleviation to agricultural depression and as a means of livelihood, it would be well to ask them—first, what they mean by "fruit," and next, whether they have ever grown fruit themselves for the purpose of selling it.

Fruit, in relation to its commercial capabilities, varies almost more than any other article included in one general term and designation. There are fruits that will bear long voyages, and which, being gathered before they are ripe, will ripen uninjured in the course of their journey to market. Familiar and valuable instances of this good quality, are oranges and lemons. Nuts of all kinds, which are botanically, although not popularly, fruits, are still more capable of lengthy transport. The same of almonds, or kernels, which are only the edible portions of certain fruits.

Is there any need to say that it makes an immense difference in the value of any crop, whether it will support a considerable interval of keeping and travelling before it is consumed, or whether it will not? Unfortunately, the fruits which can best be depended on as sure to give a more or less abundant annual crop, are amongst those which least bear transport to a distance. Raspberries, so easy to grow in

a soil that is not too dry, and supporting well a considerable amount of shade, can rarely appear at dessert in large towns, because, in the course of their journey, they fall into an unrepresentable juicy mess, great part of which drains away and is lost, unless brought in an earthen vessel. In the country, fresh gathered from the garden, they are delicious with the addition of a little cream and sugar.

Strawberries, which thrive in any good sound loam well exposed to air and sunshine, bear carriage better, but still not in bulk. Corners of fields at the extremity of Brittany are planted with strawberries for the Paris market. The sorts vary greatly in their merits as to being good or indifferent travellers. The first, combined with earliness, is the quality sought by market-gardeners. New varieties, with these recommendations, are constantly being offered by nurserymen. One of the latest, *La Bruxelloise*, is described as large, vermilion red, exquisite, productive, surpassing all others in earliness, keeping and supporting transport well, and, consequently, excellent for culture on a large scale. But, in truth, there is a fashion in strawberries. Varieties, once great favourites, like *Sir Charles Napier*, are now discarded, on account of tenderness of constitution, or other defect, to make room for novelties which promise better—but do not always keep their promise.

Currants and gooseberries are still more to be depended on as travellers, if gathered dry, and packed in baskets containing only moderate quantities. Nor are they difficult in respect to soil, situation, and aspect. The chief effect of those influences is to induce more or less earliness in ripening. All the sorts, too, are easily propagated, and soon come into bearing.

A favourite liqueur in France, called *Cassis*—from a town of that name on the Mediterranean coast, between Marseilles and Toulon, which trades largely in olive oil, capers, wines, and fruits—has black currants for the basis of its flavouring. Our grandmothers made black-currant wine, which, when George the Fourth was Regent, was thought “not bad” by school-boys.

Persons who think of growing these fairly-sure, but perishable, fruit in any great quantity, will do well to think of their market beforehand. If they can be near to, and make a contract with, any large jam-preserving establishment, even at low but assured prices, so much the

better. It is a mockery to tell farmers, whose affairs are not prosperous, that they can set themselves right by growing fruit and making it into jam themselves. They have only to consult the current prices in the shops. Indeed, it is admitted that “opinions will differ as to whether much profit can be got from fruit-growing in this country, except on a great scale, as by Lord Sudeley, with all the appliances for jam-making and fruit-drying, so as to secure against gluts in the market, and in cottage-gardens.” To this it may be remarked that, the greater the scale the greater the risk, and the greater the crash should things go wrong.

The worst of it is, that the poor fellow, who gives up farming for fruit-growing, will have to acquire a new art and learn a new trade. They are industries which require long experience and practice, often transmitted from father to son, and at any rate demanding some apprenticeship. He must be taught the budding of stone-fruits; the grafting of apples and pears; the pruning, planting, and renewing soft fruits; and all at their respective seasons. If the master does not work himself, he should at least know and be able to direct what work must be done, how, and when.

If the enemies of corn crops, roots, and pastures be counted by scores, the voracious and destructive foes of fruit will have to be reckoned by their thousands. And, unfortunately, the remedies are few, partial, or difficult of application. And how are you to ward off an onslaught like this? “A gale of exceptional severity prevailed throughout the North Warwickshire district during Saturday night, October the twenty-seventh, 1888, and the whole of Sunday. The force of the wind was so great that in many gardens and orchards apple and pear trees were stripped of their fruit, the ground being strewn with the produce. Trees were uprooted in some of the more exposed situations.” Fallen fruit may, perhaps, sell for something; but it is not such windfalls as these that will make a man’s fortune.

One disadvantage of wholesale fruit-growing is, that at some seasons it occupies a great many hands, and at others very few. Some fruits—strawberries, raspberries—require daily looking over and gathering during their period of ripening. That over, the plants are cultivated with a moderate amount of care bestowed on them from time to time. No doubt, extra gatherers, like hop-pickers,

would be forthcoming, were a demand for them to arise. But fruit requires more delicate and cleanly handling than hops do. Moreover, hop-pickers do not eat what, and while, they pick; whereas, it would be difficult to prevent currants and gooseberries from being tasted, or to forbid a bite out of a rosy-cheeked apple. During the vintage, the quantity of grapes eaten by workpeople is considerable, notwithstanding that they are well looked after. An equal percentage subtracted from a raspberry or strawberry crop would make a serious hole in the grower's profits. The value even of apples and pears is seriously diminished by rough treatment in gathering. I once sold the surplus produce of a small orchard at a price above the average, "because master and mistress had helped to gather the fruit."

Supposing their fruit trees, bushes, plants, or canes, to be well established and in full bearing, persons who embark in fruit-growing on any but the most moderate scale, need still be possessed of sufficient capital—when one, two, or three bad years occur successively, as they will—to enable them to wait and hold their own until good years follow to bring them again up to the mark. The case is similar to that of wine-growers, with their vicissitudes of profitable and unprofitable harvests; only there is this great difference, namely, that a superabundant crop of wine will keep, and improve by the keeping, both in quality and price—thin wines can be mixed with others of superior body—whereas, a superabundance of fruit will not keep long, but will decrease both in bulk and value every day.

A complaint is made that our shops are full of plums, imported from abroad, which might be grown in England as well. Might they? That is the question. It would be just as reasonable to complain that our shops are full of oranges, which might possibly be grown in England—in greenhouses. But commerce does not take note of possibilities, but of quantity, quality, and cost.

If the North of France finds it necessary to obtain a supply of greengage and other plums from the Centre and the South, surely England need not scruple to accept the consequences of her geographical position, without fighting a too hazardous battle with atmospheric and climatic influences. No doubt, greengages can be grown in England as well as in the North

of France; but not with sufficient earliness, certainty, or quantity, to make them a safe speculation as a paying crop. As a luxury, home-grown greengages are both pleasant and possible; but as a steadily profitable source of income, will they pay for the ground they occupy and the cost of production? That is the problem to be solved before investing capital in their culture. For, in these days of Free Trade, English fruit-growers will hardly ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to impose a heavy tax on imported fruit, as a protection against foreign competition.

It is a mistake to assert in general terms that "there is nothing as regards climate or soil which should prevent the raising of English fruit for the English markets." All fruits and vegetables, to pay, require to be grown under specially favourable conditions, which are not found everywhere, either in England or on the Continent.

Even in climates more genial than our own, there are degrees in the profitable cultivation of fruit. Orange trees are grown for their blossoms alone, to be employed in confectionery and the manufacture of perfumes, in spots where oranges, when ripe, would be in small request. Lemons have to be grown trained to a wall, like peach trees with us, in localities where standard orange trees thrive perfectly in the open.

What has become of Cobbett's Indian Corn, which was to confer a cheap loaf on the cottager? Where are the white mulberry trees, which were to feed the silkworms, which were to make England a silk-producing country, independent of Italy?

Stone-fruits thrive best in soil containing a decided admixture of chalk or gypsum. Thus Kent supplies cherries, and Montreuil-aux-Pêches, near Paris, peaches. The plum tribe, on which no arts of acclimatisation have been able to confer a habit of flowering late, must be sheltered from early frosts in spring, otherwise the crop is nil.

The plum-grower's expectations, indeed, like Cardinal Wolsey's, are far too often doomed to disappointment:

To-day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope; to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;
The third day comes a frost—a killing frost,
And when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
His greatness is a-ripening, nips his shoot;
And then he falls.

The most favoured spots for the growth

of kitchen vegetables are also peculiar in their soil and situation. The conditions which enable Cornwall to supply us with early potatoes, broccoli, and other good things, do not exist elsewhere, to the same extent, in England. Roscoff, on the opposite coast of Brittany, is similarly circumstanced. The Petit Courgain (not the fishermen's quarter), near Calais, and Rosendael, near Dunkirk, export enormous quantities of first-rate early vegetables, grown in nearly pure sand, enriched with town manure. It is noticeable that all these spots are quite close to the sea, and subject to its influences. From the two last places, fruits are all but absent.

The old proverb, "Plant pears, plant for your heirs," though now modified by the practice of raising dwarf pyramidal trees grafted on quince stocks and by espaliers, or trees trained against walls, is still true of tall standard orchard trees, especially those intended for the production of perry pears. Now, in many cases, the heirs who would profit by the planting would be the landlords.

Early apples are not much wanted, except as ornaments to the dinner table. They will not keep long; and when they come in, there is plenty of other good fruit available. Nevertheless, choice specimens of the Transparent Codling, the Irish Peach, Emperor Alexander, and Hawthornden are always welcome to look at and admire, if not to eat.

Late-blossoming apples, more to be depended on and more useful when they come, are still liable to injury from our protracted springs, which often make sad havoc with the weight of their crops.

An increased supply of home-grown fruit is most likely to come, not in heavy masses from big fruit-farms, but in widespread detail from small peasant-proprietors, who cultivate the kinds best suited to their holdings, as a supplement to their other produce, and not as a staple crop. Such folks will not be too proud to work with their own hands, or to deliver their fruit to customers by themselves or their wives, and so avoid the good pleasure and the charges of middlemen, not to mention the great saving thus possible in the payment of wages. They are people who will have learned to look before they leap, to know that there is many a slip between the blossom and the profit, and not to risk in a doubtful enterprise more than they can well afford to lose.

A PRODIGAL SON.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER III.

THAT day was a day of horrors for Serjeant Stronge. When he had sufficiently recovered from the shock of the announcement of his son's suicide, he went down to the mortuary, where he saw the poor lad lying stark and stiff; his famished face and threadbare clothes bearing fearful testimony to the misery he had suffered, before the kindly Thames had given him repose for ever. Horror-stricken by the sight; conscience-stricken by the frightful result of his resentment, the broken-hearted, broken-spirited old man made enquiries for the widow and child. Their residence was soon discovered in the fourth floor of a rickety house up a squalid alley. With trembling steps the Serjeant followed a policeman there. He found the widow frenzied with sorrow for her husband's loss. She may have been only a scullery-maid, but she adored, with her whole heart and soul, the young gentleman who had loved her with an honest love. She had never seen the Serjeant, and did not know him; but when the policeman, who had guided him there, told her who he was, she greeted him with a wild cry of "Murderer!" The old man, horrified beyond expression, tried to appease her by proffers of assistance, but she spurned them with a furious contempt. The scene was horribly painful, and on the old lawyer's already shattered nerves it had a fearful effect. When, at last, he left the wretched apartment and the raving woman, he was so weak that it was only by the policeman's help that he was enabled to get down the shaky stairs and into the cab that awaited him below.

That night, when he returned to King's Bench Walk and sat down before the fire, his face was as white and ghastly as the face of the dead. He had not been a kind master to his old laundress, but so pitiful was his condition that her heart was melted towards him. She stayed long in the room, in the hope that she might be of service to him; but he seemed to be unconscious of her presence. At last she asked him if she could do nothing for him. The sound of her voice startled him from his reverie; but when he realised who it was that spoke, he irritably told her to get home. With a bitter feeling that no trials or afflictions could ever change him, she obeyed his order.

After her departure he sat motionless for a long time, gazing in silence into the glowing fire before him. What agonised feelings of sorrow and remorse tore his broken spirit! What bitter recollections of the long distant, but unforgotten past—of his dead Edith and his dead boy—passed through his whirling brain! With a heart so firm and a mind so strong as his, the little griefs which vex little men pass unnoticed; but when the great griefs come, the griefs that can break such a heart and unsettle such a mind, the agonies suffered are those of a giant.

The storm which had raged the previous night was now gone, and a dead calm reigned in its stead. Not a sound was to be heard among the leafless trees and deserted courts without; not a whisper of the wind, not an echo of a human voice or step. Inside, a still deeper silence, if possible, prevailed. Not a draught rustled the heavy curtains; not a mouse scampered behind the ancient wainscoting; even the fire itself had ceased to hiss and crackle, and lay in glowing embers on the hearth. No noise broke the oppressive silence, save one: the great old clock in the corner went on tick-tick, tick-tick, ceaselessly and calmly, like the footsteps of an ever-pursuing, inevitable fate.

As the old lawyer sat that night amid that profound silence, gazing into the glowing coals and musing mournfully over his sorrows, a strange thought entered his troubled mind. Hitherto he had been emphatically the strong man who relied on his own strength. He had laughed at those weak souls who trusted to luck, or fate, or Heaven; by whatever name they called it he cared little. For himself, he trusted only to himself; and he was convinced that by his own right arm he could, and would, shape his own destiny. Now it occurred to him, for the first time, that, after all, perhaps he—he, John Stronge—was a plaything in the hands of an irresistible and unknown Power.

The thought startled, staggered him. Could it be that what he had laughed at as foolishness was the highest wisdom? Could it be that his whole life's work had been planned on a wrong principle—that he had not considered what should have been the chief consideration? In his weak, spirit-broken state, he felt inclined to believe it.

Influenced by this, to him, unusual train of thought, he roused himself and searched out from among his books one that he had

not opened for many a year. It was a present given to him, during their courtship, by his dead Edith. What recollections that old book recalled! what recollections of youth, and love, and happiness, of that sweet past, before fiery ambition had hardened his soul as clay is hardened in a furnace!

That book was the Bible. Opening it at random he read. As he read, the stillness around seemed to become more and more profound. Outside, not a murmur was to be heard; inside, the very ticking of the great old clock seemed for the time to cease. A strange, intense, unnatural silence pervaded everything.

He read on, only half realising what he read; his mind was too much occupied by the fearful scenes and experiences of the day to be easily fixed on anything else. But gradually his attention became more and more attracted, until at last it was rivetted on the page before him. A feeling of fear, a sense of the supernatural seized upon him, for he found that by some strange chance he had opened the Bible at that passage which of all others applied to his present circumstances. He had opened it at the Parable of the Prodigal Son. As he read, the silence became more and more oppressively intense.

"And he arose," the old lawyer read, "and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

"And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

"But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

"And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

"For this my son was dead, and is alive again—"

"Tap, tap, tap," sounded suddenly on the outside door through the preternatural silence.

With a gasp the old lawyer sprang to his feet. Holding by the mantelpiece to steady his trembling form, he waited for a repetition of the knock; quivering with fear, pale with excitement, he waited. Everything was as silent as the grave. Suddenly the great old clock in the corner chimed out the hour, loud and clear. It struck ten.

Sweating with agony and terror, the old

lawyer stood waiting for a renewal of the knock. He waited in vain. None came. Everything remained as silent as the grave. There was no sound of footsteps on the stairs. There was no sign of human motion or human presence. The knock seemed like a summons from the dead!

At length, almost fainting with weakness and fear, Serjeant Stronge sank back into his chair, and sat there for a long time trembling. An hour had elapsed before he had recovered sufficient calmness to think reasonably of the sound he seemed to have heard.

"My mind is getting unhinged," he then said to himself. "My imagination is playing me tricks. Trouble is unnerving me altogether. I must pull myself together—must make an effort to take my mind off these ghastly subjects, or I shall go raving mad."

He rose nervously, and put some fresh coals on the fire. He took the shade off the reading-lamp, and turned up the flame to its highest point. He wanted light, more light. Darkness had become a terror to him. But yesterday he was a man who would have faced anything; to-day sorrow and remorse had made him a child again who feared the dark.

That night Serjeant Stronge did not go to bed. Through the long hours of darkness he sat before the blazing fire with his lamp burning high, and trembled if a curtain rustled or a window creaked.

The next morning being Monday, his old clerk called according to his custom at King's Bench Walk, bringing with him the letters from Serjeant Stronge's business chambers in Pump Court.

"I can't attend to business for the present, John," the Serjeant said to him. "Tell any client who asks about me that I cannot be seen till after the Vacation."

"I will, sir," answered the old clerk, who had seen all about his master's calamities in the morning papers.

"And, John," said the Serjeant, "just come back here in the evening. I may want you to stop with me over night. The troubles I've gone through since Saturday have quite unnerved me. I'm actually afraid to stay here at night alone."

"Yes, sir," replied the old clerk, dutifully.

He had not been used to be spoken to by his master in that gentle way, and the softening of the Serjeant's manner touched him.

"And, John," the Serjeant went on,

"you might go round to 12, Bute's Court, where my son's widow lives, and see if you can induce her to accept help. She refused it from me yesterday; but she was wild with despair. She may be calmer and more reasonable to-day. I'm too weak and—and nervous to see her again myself."

"Yes, sir," answered the old clerk.

The change in the Serjeant was amazing to John Mundie, and pathetic, too. He felt deeply for that man whom he had so long known as proud, strong, and arbitrary, and whom he now saw so soft and feeble. He could well imagine how fearful the suffering must have been which had wrought such a revolution.

In the evening the old clerk came back to the Serjeant's resident chambers. In reply to his master's enquiries, he told him that his son's widow had become so ill that there was danger of her speedy death. He had had her removed to the hospital, and had taken the child home to his own wife.

"John," said the old lawyer, "you have been kinder to my own flesh and blood than I have been. Heaven bless you for it! 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall have mercy.' You can sleep in Charl—in the vacant room, John, and leave your door open, so as to hear me if I call."

"Yes, sir," said John, and walked off to the old room, which poor Charlie, when he was at home, used to occupy.

That night, as on the previous one, the old lawyer placed himself in his easy-chair before the fire, and gave up his mind to the terrible occurrences of the two previous days and nights. He had endeavoured to divert his thoughts to something else, with very scant success; but, as the evening came on, he ceased to struggle. He felt that it was useless; and that for the present nothing else could occupy his attention.

Though worn out by misery and fatigue, he never for a moment slept. There he sat, silent and motionless as a statue, but with his eyes open and his ears alert.

As the dreaded hour of the night—which his son paid him that last sad visit—drew near, he began to feel sensations of terror and apprehension coming over him once more. From the moment the great old clock struck nine, his eyes never for an instant left its face. He watched the minute hand slowly making the revolution of the dial; and as it drew closer and closer to the fatal hour, his excitement grew greater and greater, until it was agonising.

At last only five minutes remained. Tick-tick, tick-tick. Slowly and more slowly the moments seemed to pass. He watched and watched, but the hand seemed stationary. It seemed to take an hour; but at last it reached three. Now, breathless with excitement, trembling with anticipation, he watched it creep on to two.

"Tap, tap, tap," sounded suddenly on the outside door.

With a face blanched and convulsed with terror the old lawyer sprang to his feet, and tried to call John. His throat and lips were so parched that they could make no sound. He tried once, he tried twice. With mind and body both paralysed, he stood there, unable to speak or move.

Suddenly the great old clock in the corner chimed out the hour loud and clear. It struck ten. Then, gasping and quivering, the Serjeant found his voice.

"John," he called out, hoarsely, "I think I heard a knock at the door. See if there's any one there."

"Yes, sir," responded John's voice.

The Serjeant heard the old clerk come out of his room and open the door. A moment afterwards he came into the sitting-room.

"No, sir," he said; "there's no one there."

"Thank you," answered the old lawyer, trying, vainly, to control the trembling of his voice. "I must have been mistaken."

Another night passed—a night of terror and agony for the old lawyer. His nerves had got thoroughly unstrung, and he could not sleep or rest. Once, worn out with fatigue, he had dozed for a moment in his chair. In that moment a fearful vision came before his sleeping eyes. His dead son as he had seen him, stark and cold, rose up before him. The phantom, though dead, was alive, for it raised its clammy hand and pointed reproachfully at him. He awoke with a scream of terror, which brought the trembling clerk hurrying into the room.

During the following day, Serjeant Stronge recovered some of his old strength and calmness. This was caused, partly, by the good news he heard, and partly by the good act he did. He heard that his son's widow was progressing favourably, and that now there was great hope of her ultimate recovery. He gave directions that every care and comfort that money could secure should be given to her. Then he did what appeared to him now in the

light of an act of reparation. He executed a will in favour of his son's widow and child. Save one thousand pounds given to his clerk and five hundred given to his laundress, all his immense fortune he bequeathed for their benefit.

His calmness, however, was not so strong as to be quite proof against any trial. As night approached, so much of his old nervousness and terror came back upon him as to make him think it wise to request John again to stop over night at his chambers.

Again the old lawyer seated himself before the fire, and again, as the hour of ten approached, he watched the great old clock. But this time he had his nerves under better control than before. He felt deeply excited, it is true; but his will, strong once more, kept the excitement in check. He was resolved that he should not, that night, let any delusions of his imagination run away with his reason.

He watched the clock with close attention. Gradually the minute hand made the revolution of the dial; his excitement grew as it approached the hour. It was now ten minutes to ten. It was now five minutes—now four—now three—now two—

"Tap, tap, tap," sounded suddenly from the outside door. He heard the knocking clearly and distinctly.

For a moment or two the old lawyer's terror was too much for him. He stood where he had sprung up when the first knock sounded, motionless and trembling. Then, with a last desperate effort of his iron will, he threw off his weakness.

"I'll be a coward no longer," he muttered to himself. "I'll show myself that this sound is the creation of my own imagination."

Nerving himself with a mighty effort, he left the room and walked down the corridor to the door. As he put out his hand to open it, the great old clock in the corner chimed out loud and clear. It struck ten.

As its last peal sounded through the chambers, the old clerk heard a scream of wildest terror, and the sound of a body falling. Rushing out of his room, he found the Serjeant lying in the corridor, opposite the open door.

Frightened half out of his wits, John lifted his master's head. To his horror and amazement the old lawyer was dead!